

Interpretive Enhancements for Rota Route 100

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Department of Public Works (DPW) is implementing a \$3,000,000 road improvement project along approximately 12 km of Route 100, on the island of Rota. This 85-square-kilometer island has a population of about 3,500 and is one of the three main islands, along with Saipan and Tinian, in the CNMI archipelago. A primary paved road along the north coast connects the airport and two population centers of Sinapalu with Songsong village and the harbor. Route 100 is currently an unpaved secondary road providing an alternate connection between the villages. It traverses a variety of natural terrain, has many prehistoric and historic features along the alignment and is a potential tourist attraction. This project is being entirely funded through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) with Federal-aid Highway program, Emergency Relief and National Highway System funds.

A key challenge is to develop an innovative mitigation of impact strategy, which satisfies local permit requirements. The main permit for all CNMI development, including public infrastructure projects, is issued by the Coastal Resources Management Office (CRMO). This office obtains Major Siting Permit conditions from other local government agencies, significantly the historic preservation office (HPO). Rota is rich in cultural resources and the Route 100 project spans a 1,000-year time period with various sites. The FHWA, by performing a federal undertaking is required by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, to conduct a Section 106 review. In accordance with the law a memorandum of agreement was developed between the Hawaii Division and the CNMI HPO for this project. In consultation with HPO, the DPW Technical Services Division (TSD) has planned a suite of interpretive enhancements to be included in the project as part of the mitigation plan. These are to be placed at representative sites along the road, tied to interpretive centers and indexed on a key map of Rota.

The 1,000-year historic period on Rota consists of the following:

- Late prehistoric (AD1000-1521) and proto-historic period (1521-1668); three disturbed *latte* sets and over 30 inland rock shelters suggesting a hunting and gathering focus;
- Spanish (1668-1898) and German (1898-1914) Colonial Period; in the Talakaya vicinity rice production and irrigation technologies for this subsistence crop not grown elsewhere in Micronesia or Polynesia;
- Japanese period (1914-1944) including World War II; transportation system developed by the Nanyo Kohatsu Kabushiki Company for sugar-cane production, consisting of loading docks, cobble masonry bridges/culverts, and two narrow gauge locomotives; WWII defensive remains—one 120mm coastal defensive gun in a concrete bunker with one empty bunker nearby and a probable concrete ammunition storage bunker, interconnected rifle pits, and rock shelter tunnel complexes.

A secondary problem to overcome is providing a concise interpretation for a variety of historical periods, in an understandable and easily recognizable form, to the public.

Three main issues raised by these challenges relate to conveying the information sensitively, blending with the natural beauty of Rota, and meeting highway safety objectives. Planning elements for these improvements requires knowledge of the resources and the visitor and assessing the impact of the interpretive site.

Conveying information requires an awareness of the subject matter and the site location. One focus is to address historical improvements, not WWII losses, economic domination by colonial powers, or pre-contact ignorance of the outside world. Another sensitive issue is private property that abuts the roadway corridor. All of the sites and interpretive centers are on private land and have the potential to enhance the property but also could offend local landowners. Also, placing too many signs, and developing roadside pull-outs has the potential to create a negative impact

